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ABSTRACT

Gender is a structure of language and an attendant attribute for each noun and all of its immediate qualifiers, providing a set of categories into which the nouns of languages are divided. Through the phenomenon of concord, verbs, adjectives, and articles are made to agree with nouns in gender, person, number, and case. Gender classifies language into divisions of natural gender (masculine, feminine, common, and neuter); grammatical gender (masculine and feminine gender assigned to every noun); and genderless. Because of gender, one is confronted with the cumbersome use of "he or she." This awkward use of the third person singular has resulted in various campaigns to "neuter" the English language, leading, for example, to the indiscriminate use of "person" or the substitution of plural pronouns for masculine singulars. Perhaps a better solution would be the creation of a common-sex pronoun. When asked to make up a word that could be used as a common-sex pronoun, however, the faculty, staff, and students at one university responded with suggestions that were largely in the realm of nonsense. Almost nobody really cared. Gender occupies an eccentric place in the English language. Consequently, it is neither logical nor illogical. Rather, it may be alogical. (A copy of the survey instrument is appended.) (HOD)

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GENDER! WHO NEEDS IT
A CLASSIFICATION AND A COMMENT

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

by

Dr. Alene Faul, Ph.D.

Gender! It is a structure of language. Its origin reaches back to so remote an antiquity, prior for thousands of years to any literary tradition, that all assumptions about its beginnings are tangled with the unfathomable. Thus, all questions about gender's need will also reside in the realm of impenetrability.

Who needs gender? Everyone. Gender is an attendant attribute for each noun and all of its immediate qualifiers. Those who speak and write are mandated to need gender. Jespersen (1964) stresses the need of gender by alluding to it as an expressive simplicity in linguistic arrangement, a derived quality, as juxtaposed to gender, as merely a primitive function (p. 395). Entwistle (1951), on the other hand, while investigating gender in the languages of Western Europe, castigates it as "a meaningless routine", and claims that gender "is evidently unnecessary," since "it is not found in many savage languages, nor in the highly civilized languages of the Far East." He predicates a use for gender, but not a need, "to discipline the sentence by concords, to

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permit hyperbation, and to give aesthetic variety in the alternation of masculine and feminine rhymes in French Verse" (pp. 194-195). Ervin-Tripp (1973) specifies a "no-need" for gender and labels it as 'an instance of imperfectly correlated grammatical systems of classification" (p. 157). Gender, like other facets of language, continues to make curious "detours." Horace, in Ars Poetica, succinctly describes these "detours" about words, as Hall (1950) explains.

> Multa renascentur quae iam cecidere, cadentque
> Quae nunc sunt in honora vocabula, si volet usus.

There is no doubt concerning the autocracy of "usuage" which decrees death, resurrection, and implenentation, not only for words, but also for gender. Translated, Horace reads:

> Many words which have already gone out of use come back to life again,
>
> And words which are now in honor fall into disuse, if usage so will (p. 152).

Gender, a Classification

Gender classified encompasses: definition, concord, division.

Definition

Barber (1965) defines gender as a set of categories into which the nouns of languages are divided (p. 272). Chomsky (1975) itemizes that gender "is simply that part of human psychology which is concerned with one particular

mental organ," and that this inescapable contingency "deprives the language of empirical content" (p. 37). Bodmer (1944) prescribes gender as "a biological distinction" (p. 101). Blanché (1935) endorses it as one of four attributes which nouns carry (p. 253), and he presages that it is not a dictator, but a guide whose "rules are simply a statement of what takes place in language" (p. 247). West (1975) establishes that although gender is universally used, only a few scholars know anything about it (p. 111).

Concord

The phenomenon of concord, Jespersen (1964) implicates, is that verbs, adjectives, and articles are made to agree with nouns in gender, person, number, and case (p. 348). Bodmer (1944) deplores that the gender concord of adjectives complicates instruction (p. 102), and the gender concord of nouns adds to the labor of learning "without contributing anything to the clarity of the statement" (p. 103). When a clear-cut distinction between adjectives and other words is recognizable, gender concord is the diagnostic characteristic which distinguishes the pronouns. Within that specific framework, Anderson (1962) appends two functions for concord: the first, informative; the second, expressive (pp. 27-28). Modern grammarians have been critical of such assumptions as the functions expressed above which, they claim, are either untested or untestable. Nevertheless, there are

certain elements in contact and differentiation, where categorization may be significant and analyses may be supplemental. In everyday experience, the obvious attributes of objects far outweigh any association which gender concords may impose.

Divisions

Man is a classifying animal, Jespersen (1964) narrates, and he tends to express his language in class distinctions which he feels more or less vaguely (p. 391). Gender has been set in divisions of (1) natural gender, (2) grammatical gender, and (3) genderlessness.

Natural gender is speculated as having been the only division in a prehistoric age, because of its approximate relationship to the male/female of the human species. Then, after centuries of grammatical gender complexities which baffled human consciousness, the return to natural gender was, or will be, inevitable. Basically, natural gender has four classifications, stemming from association with humanity: (1) masculine, (2) feminine, (3) common, and (4) neuter. In English, these four principles of natural gender are very simple, Blancké (1935) maintains. Nouns and pronouns denoting male beings are masculine; those denoting female beings are feminine; nouns and pronouns denoting either male or female are common; those denoting objects without sex are neuter. Neuter means "neither." Sometimes, in the use of a figure of speech

called personification, masculine or feminine identity is imputed to a word normally neuter. For example, a ship on the high seas may be referred to as: Here she comes! (p. 253).

Grammatical gender is not so simple. By some strange system of classification buried remorselessly in the past, masculine and feminine gender were assigned to every noun. In Latin, a wall (murus) was masculine, a door or gate (porta) was feminine, and a roof (tectum) was neuter. Also, in Latin, the adjectives are inflected to show a difference in gender; a big wall would be "magnus murus," a big gate would be "magna porta," a big roof would be "magnum tectum." The French have no neuter gender. Chalk, table, classroom are feminine; while book, pencil, and dog are masculine; even a female dog is masculine. Also, in French, the articles are inflected.

the chalk - la craie
the book - le livre
a classroom - une salle de classe
a dog - un chien

In both Italian and Spanish there is no neuter gender. German and Latin possess a neuter gender, but there is no commonality to determine word placement which varies from country to country. For example, in German, "wall" is feminine, whereas in Latin, it is masculine. In German, sun is feminine and moon is masculine. In Latin and Greek, the genders are reversed.

Grammatical gender is sometimes looked upon as something valuable. Jespersen (1964) quotes Schroeder's Die formale

Unterscheidung as pronouncing,

> The formal distinction of genders is decidedly an enormous advantage which the Aryan, Semetic, and Egyptian languages have before all others (p. 246).

In contradistinction, he also presents Aasen's Norsk Grammatik which finds that the preservation of the old natural genders "give vividness and variety to a language" (p. 346). Other scholars have recognized disadvantages in grammatical gender. Tegner regrets that in Swedish it is impossible to give form when there is only a masculine gender word for both sexes. German grammarians express difficulty in chosing pronouns to agree with nouns in conflict with natural gender. French grammarians have disputed without end about the propriety of masculine form always prevailing in plural usages including both sexes. Brugmann, in Jespersen (1964), condemns grammatical gender as "unmeaning forms" which have nothing to do with the idea of masculinity and feminity. Oftentimes, he explains, when a natural difference of sex exists, language employs only one gender (pp. 391-392). In some African languages, grammatical gender combines all men and all big things in one gender, and all women together with all small things in the other (p. 394). The Algonkin languages use life and lifelessness as the marker for gender division. To compound this unusual distinction, their definitions for "life" and "lifeless" are not strictly scientific; primitive peoples do not define as modern dictionaries indicate. The primitives ascribe or deny "life" according to criteria which have little or no

acquiesence with meanings today. For example, some dead people are accepted as lifeless; others, incredibly, live! This perhaps has its parallel in German gender: The word wife (weib) is neuter; hence its pronoun must also be neuter "es" and not the feminine "sie." Bodmer (1944) explains an equally unusual grammatical gender rule in Scandanavian. Most of the nouns belong to the non-neuter or common classification. Nouns that remain in neuter gender are: substances, trees, fruits, young animals, countries, continents, and all abstracts nouns that end in "ande" or "ende" (p. 278). Mark Twain in A Tramp Abroad translates from a German Sunday-school text a grammatical gender usage:

Gretchen: Where is the turnip?
Wilhelm: She is in the kitchen.
Gretchen: Where is the accomplished and beautiful maiden?
Wilhelm: It has gone to the opera.

A minority of languages, contain a classification according to natural sex, but that classification is just as partial and imperfect, Diamond (1959) philosophizes, and its boundaries are equally vague, equally extended beyond merely logical limits. In most languages, gender extends to all nouns. In Chinook and Bushman, only a few nouns are gendered. In some languages the right hand is masculine and the left, feminine. Hebrew, from some mysterious beginning, uses the reverse. Indo-European languages extend gender to nouns, pronouns, and adjectives. In Blackfoot, even verbs are included (p. 99).

Genderless, or its equivalency, is perhaps the result of the unreason of gender. There is considerable evidence in psychological research about the processes by which stimulus generalization and mediated generalizations occur. Genderlessness is not identical with inability to express sex differences; with the exception of language in a few very primitive civilizations, it is not total. In modern English, all adjectives and articles are genderless; also, most of the pronouns, such as: I, you, they, whoever, each, and somebody are neither male nor female. The English interrogative "who" is unlike the "quis" or "quae" of the Romans, limited to one gender and one number. Hence, the English question: "Who did it?" translated into exact Latin would require a combination of four inquiries:

Quis hoc fecit? (masculine singular)
Quae hoc fecit? (feminine singular)
Qui hoc fecerunt (masculine plural)
Quae hoc fecerunt (feminine plural)

The limited gender and number of the English question makes it much more indefinite than in any highly flexional languages; and indefiniteness, Jespersen (1964) pronounces, "in many cases means greater precision, or a closer correspondence between thought and expression" (p. 348).

One of the more cogent examples of inattention to gender is Panini's grammar of the Sanskrit, a highly analytic and descriptive work in which sounds, systems of accentuation, and grammatical structure of India's ancient tongue are presented

accurately and painstakingly. West (1975) calls it "one of the greatest monuments of human intelligence," and dates its completion to 400 B.C. (p. 19). Panini wanted to preserve the ancient pronunciation and interpretation of the Brahmin sacred texts, because holiness depended upon the original language forms, especially pronunciation. Pei (1972) praises Panini's grammar as unsurpassed in "historical development, philosophical and psychological interpretation" (p. 2). In this text, Panini makes references to works of earlier grammar no longer available, for the language had been flourishing for 1,500 years. The Rig-Veda, one of the sacred texts he mentions, dates back to 1,200 B.C.

Gender, A Comment

This comment about gender focuses specifically upon the concept of creating a new common-sex pronoun for the English third person singular. Coleridge in Anima Poetae regretted the lack of such a pronoun as a referent for the genderless word "person."

The cumbersome use of "he or she," the feministly offensive use of "he" in the generic sense, the violent use of "he/she" (especially when the "slash" is enunciated) would all be avoided if a new common-sex pronoun could be designed, and by some giant PR program catapulted into common usage. Jespersen (1964) proposes the adoption of a pronoun from the Ido Language.

"Anyone who has written much in Ido," he encourages "will have often felt how convenient it is to have the common-sex pronoun 'lu' (he or she)" (p. 347). McFadden (1981) pleaded for a common-sex pronoun in the third-person singular, during her denunication of those who neutered the English language by use of the indiscriminate "person." She hopes that some "person or persons unknown would come up with one" such pronoun (p. 9). She decries the neutering of Corinthians: "Though I speak with the tongues of persons or angels," she shudders that "the parson person who read Corinthians is now in his own Church referring to God as 'He/She'" (p. 9). Tongue-in-cheek, McFadden proposes using the feminine forms instead of the masculine as the generic pronoun for the next few centuries. She concludes, by calling the "person battle" a mug's game, which neuters "the language already fat, bland, and lethargic" (p. 10).

Concomitantly, Spaeth (1981) attacked "The Nonsexist Assault on Language" by the National Council of Teachers of English. He finds both the spirit and the substance of the attack objectionable, because "the guidelines treat the language like an innocent puppy wanting to be neutered for the convenience of its human masters (p. 12). He cringes, because NCTE recommended plain illiteracy by authenticating plural pronouns to substitute for masculine singulars. Jespersen (1964) presents two literary examples of this

singular/plural mix. The first was Thackery who wrote: Nobody prevents you, do they? The second was Shakespeare who wrote: Everybody to rest themselves betake! Jespersen (1964) affirms that the substitution of the singular for the plural is not wholly illogical, because, he argues, "everybody" is much the same as "all men" and "nobody" is the negation of "all men." Interestingly, Jespersen (1964) feels that the argument does not hold good in the case of George Eliot who wrote: "I shouldn't like to punish any one, even if they'd done me wrong," nor in the case of Fielding who addressed "the reader's heart, if he or she have any" (p. 348). Spaeth's simple stance is that "the importance of language should not be denigrated." He regrets that "standards of literacy have fallen below the permissible," but he hopes fervently that "precision, elegance, good sense" will not fall "before the feminist juggernaut" (p. 13).

Firth (1957) believed that speech was social magic. Agreement with Firth's belief launched the survey to discover a common-sex pronoun. The survey questioned three areas.

1. Are you offended by the generic "he" as referent to both men and women?
2. Are you aesthetically disturbed by the he/she usage?
3. Would you appreciate being able to use a common-sex pronoun in the third person singular?

The survey's fourth element solicited the common-sex pronoun's creation.

4. Please make-up a word that could be used as a common-sex pronoun for both he/she, him/her, his/hers. Your word could be inflexional as the nominative, objective, and possessive case pronouns above indicate.

The survey then provided a space for comment.

Approximately 15 Saint Louis University students canvassed the campus: Faculty, Staff, Students, and Passersby. Results of the survey are appended.

Margulis (1975) labels all language users as "victims of established roles dicated by society," and he proves his statement with the nursery rhymes which detail the essential ingredients for making little girls and little boys (p. 119).

> Little girls are made
> of sugar and spice
> and everything nice.
>
> Little boys are fashioned
> from snipes and snails
> any puppy dogs tails.

Consumate nonsense? Perhaps. But when Margulis continues by asserting that "language defines everyone in terms of male gender, it is well to reasses those ingredients. "Mankind," he proposes, represents everyone, but no such strength or universality emanates from "woman-kind." Even the Doonesbury comic strips, he reenforces, substantiate these differences, for "they are drawn with the assumption that people, unless specifically identified as women, are men" (p. 123).

Gender occupies a most eccentric position. It is far greater and more interesting than any efforts to exhaust its study. It is neither logical nor illogical. It is alogical, and everybody needs it. Hence, I am concluding my paper with a slide-tape tribute: "A Song for Gender"!

A SONG FOR GENDER

Sing a song of gender
Whose ancient pedigree
Framed rules for nouns and adjectives,
But set the adverbs free.

English of primeval time
Helped gender codes arise
From systematic contrasts
Of symbols, sex, and size.

"Woman" was classed masculine,
Neuter was "the wife";
"Concubine" was feminine
In gender, as in life.

Drop a knife upon the floor,
A man is bound to call;
"Knife" was gendered masculine
In Russian protocol.

Dropped forks meant that woman would
Come to the house that day;
"Forks" were noted feminine
In Russian's gender way.

Force of deviation
Italian syntax shows;
Final vowels pose feminine,
As male nouns oft disclose:
"il dentista," "il propheta."

Russian claims "life" feminine;
In Czech, it's classed as male.
German's "death" is woman;
It's man in Russia's tale.

Latin places "poeta,"
"Agricola," as men;
Declension opts for feminine,
As "nauta" tells again.

Gender's strangest consequence
Was fixing words by rhyme.

Gender 14

"Actress-distress," feminine,
"Actor-tractor," masculine,
In the Norman Conquest Time.

Gender sojourned centuries.
Small reason, little rhyme
Accompanied its rulings
Through enigmatic time.

So sing a song for gender.
Praise its devious way.
Marvel that it has survived
To prod us still, today.

Sing a song! A Gender Song!

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To you who are being surveyed.

The student asking your help is performing a class assignment. Please cooperate!

The survey's results will be part of a paper to be presented at Ohio University in the Fifth Annual Communication, Language and Gender Conference, October 15-16, 1982.

Sister Alene Faul, Ph.D.

SURVEY

in a search for a common-sex gender pronoun for the third person singular

Check one:

MALE _____ FEMALE _____

AGE _____ (optional)

SIGNATURE (optional) _____

Check one:

1. Are you offended by the use of "he" for both men and women?

   Yes _____ No _____ Undecided _____

2. Does the use of he/she, or "he slash she" seem clumsy, inappropriate?

   Yes _____ No _____ Undecided _____

3. Would you wish that we had a common-sex pronoun to use instead of "he/she?"

   Yes _____ No _____ Undecided _____

4. The Ido language has such a pronoun "lu" for he/she. Please make a suggestion for such a pronoun in English.

   _____

5. Do you believe this pronoun needs to be inflexional?

   Yes _____ No _____ Undecided _____

Survey 2

6. If "yes" above, suggest a form of your pronoun for

nominative case he/she _____

objective case him/her _____

possessive case his/hers _____

COMMENTS (will be appreciated)

SUMMARY OF SURVEY

—which searched for a common-sex gender pronoun for the third person singular in the English language—

250 surveys were given out. 230 surveys were returned.

138 females and 92 males completed the surveys.

194 of the surveyed were between the ages of 17 and 30;

10, from 31 to 50; and 1 over 51.

1. Are you offended by the use of "he" for both men and women?

   Yes 39 No 155 Undecided 22 Total 216

2. Does the use of he/she or "he slash she" seem clumsy, inappropriate?

   Yes 124 No 85 Undecided 20 Total 229

3. Would you wish that we had a common-sex pronoun to use instead of "he/she"?

   Yes 79 No 104 Undecided 47 Total 230

4. The Ido language has a common-sex pronoun, "lu." Please make a suggestion for a common-sex pronoun in English.

   a, android, bi, bisoyle, che, DoK, e, e, eke, fesma, hes, hes, hesh, heshe, hye, id, ie, ish, ille, kes, kush, la, laslatl, le, les, lim, loo, lu, lulu, ne, mesh, one, person, ru, se, sem, sey, sehe, shehe, shet, shez, shhe, shim, si, te, them, they, tish, tu, ubi, we, you

Survey 2

5. Do you believe this pronoun needs to be inflexional?

Yes 79 No 104 Undecided 47 Total 198

6. If "yes" above, suggest a form for your pronoun.

Nominative	Objective	Possessive
bleen	bleus	bleu's
che	cherm	ches
Do K	Do Ks	DoK's
e	ekim	ers
hes	hes	hes
hesh	herm	hesh
hesh	heshe	heshes
heshe	heshem	heshems
heshe	heshes	heshe's
ho	hum	hos
id	ids	eus
ish	ishin	ishes
lula	luli	lulo
nu	nut	nus
ru	rd	rus
seh	sih	seh's
sem	ser	sems
te	ter	ters
tish	tishmer	tishmes
tu	tus	tuses
ve	vim	vis
yon	yim	yan

COMMENTS

—Only 16% of the surveyed made comments—

1. In other languages, one pronoun is used that is not inflexional. The presence of inflexional words in the English language makes it so complex.

2. I've never given it any thought. It really doesn't matter to me.

3. I don't think that making a problem out of it, is really necessary.

4. Amusement! I couldn't care less.

Survey 3

5. I do not like to be referred to as a collective body in unisex pronouns.

6. Why change a good and long tradition.

7. I feel the way it is now is fine; no need to change it. People are used to it, and it doesn't hurt anything.

8. LEAVE IT THE SAME!

9. It would be so much easier to have one word to mean both genders, especially for people who are learning the language.

10. Leave the language the way it is!

11. Perhaps the use of a third person pronoun is helpful (certainly it is in Spanish), but I am not certain of the feasibility of this project. If we were to distinguish here, I would suggest distinguishing as well between you and thou, both singular and plural. With every best wish for the success of your project.

12. I think that the slash between him/her should be kept to avoid confusion between genders.

13. The use of he slash she (he/she) is sometimes annoying; thus, it can stop or interrupt the flow of a sentence. Only in certain rare instances is he/she appropriate.

14. I think things should be left as they are. English language is hard enough without introducing a problem like that.

15. Men <u>are</u> the best!

16. He/she is clumsy. Why not just use one pronoun, <u>he</u> or <u>she</u>; then make it understood that it is not a discrimination in use.

17. The general form is masculine in Latin, English, and a number of other languages. Why change centuries old languages for some unorganized feminist movement?!?!?

18. I feel the American language needs a common-sex pronoun to simplify our language.

ADDENDUM

The following notions were extemporaneously stated in my presentations at Ohio University last October of 1982. Because the survey results were only tabulated the night prior to delivery, there is merit in writing them.

MY REFLECTIONS ON THE "SUMMARY OF SURVEY"

Most of the students signed the surveys, since they knew me from classes or by reputation. An essence of fun and joviality accompanied the responses. Approximately 10% of the papers contained a written comment to this effect, particularly in the attempts to create inflexional patterns. I enjoyed these experiences. My conclusions, however, are not amusing. I was chagrined that almost nobody really cared. The few who did were shrouded in their own vituperative feminist denunciations which generally impede progress. The common-gender suggestions for a third person singular pronoun were largely in the realm of nonsense. Nevertheless, I was interested in the "yon," "seh," and "id" offerings; I was also drawn to the "lu" of the Ido language. I am confident that any of these "pronouns," with an area-wide or nation-wide press/media campaign, could make a noticeable impact on usage.

Even without this campaigning, I already see the third person plural (they, theirs, them) becoming this common-gender, third person singular pronoun. The generic "he" has become overwhelmingly disfavored, and the "he/she" promotes its own linguistic awkwardness. Like Spaeth, I am rhetorically dissatisfied with this singular pluarlity, yet I admire the National Council of Teachers of English whose foresight

predictively permitted this until-then erroneous usage.

If any of you at ERIC begin to campaign for a third person singular common-sex pronoun, please consider me as #1 in your followership. I am old enough to be comfortable with the generic "he," but futuristic enough to want a new common-gender third person singular.